

Major Thoughts from the Minor Prophets Malachi; Question and Answer Time

The book is attributed to the prophet Malachi, the name meaning “My Messenger”. Little is known of this prophet since he is not mentioned anywhere else in the scriptures. The book is appropriately placed as the last book in the Old Testament. Based on the context of the book, we can safely date this prophecy to around or after 440 BC. He ministered during the time of Nehemiah. The word used for governor (**chp 1:8**) is of Persian origin, dating it to the age of Persian rule, during the reign of Artaxerxes.

The book is written in a question and answer style, known as the dialectic style. It was an effective method for dealing with their skepticism, arrogance and indifference toward God. This method cannot be attended to passively, it invokes active participation, as well as a genuine self examination.

Beginning with Cyrus (**Is 44:28**), the nations conquered by Persia would be granted many freedoms, even being allowed to return to their homeland. The Jews who desired, returned and rebuilt much of their land and religion, but had they learned the lessons from the exile period? The book of Malachi reveals the spiritual condition of these people roughly 100 years after their return from exile. Their hearts were wandering from God. They were divorcing their wives in exchange for marriages to women of “strange gods”. They had rebuilt their temple, but their worship was suffering. They re-established the law, but had polluted the sacrifices. They rebuilt the walls and their homes but much of the land was undoubtedly still in ruin. They had a long history of judging God’s blessings according to their national prosperity. They were robbing God of what was due to Him. They were growing disillusioned with God, questioning His love and doubting His purposes. Malachi bridges the failures of the present with the hope of the future. Its relevance extends beyond the problems of the people to whom it was written and is ripe with lessons that still ring true today. We will begin with a consideration of God’s purposes for His people during the exile period.

I. God’s Plan for Judah during the Exile Period

- *Jeremiah 29:10-11* For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. **11** For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.
- A. The captivity under Babylon and Persia was a time of refining in the “furnace of affliction”. Those who passed through the fire would be made pure in heart, subjects fit for what was coming.
 - *Isaiah 48:10* Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.

B. It was a time when their religion would become less national and more individual with a focus shifting from outward worship to a worship from the heart.

1. They would have to learn how to worship Jehovah apart from their ancestral homeland.

- *Psalms 137:4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?*

2. Temple worship would not be possible in these “strange lands”. The practice of gathering in small groups and places of worship would come out of this period.

- *Zechariah 4:10 For who hath despised the day of small things?*
- *John 4:21-23 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*

3. They found a new appreciation for the law of Moses and the reading of the law. We often don't realize the value of things while we are in possession of them.

- *Nehemiah 8:2-4 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose...*

4. Individual responsibility would take center stage more than ever before in their history as a nation.

- *Ezekiel 18:20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*

C. The dispersion of the Jews during the period of exile would position God's chosen throughout the world and in the right places for a work that was coming.

- *Jeremiah 29:7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.*

God was using these things to whittle them down to a sharp point, to burn off the chaff and to transform their splendid material kingdom to a spiritual one. Malachi gives us a glimpse of the

struggles that they were having embracing these truths and a glimpse of the condition of these people at the close of the Old Testament scriptures.

II. Question and Answer Time

A. Wherein hast thou loved us?

Malachi 1:1-5 The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. 2 I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, 3 And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. 4 Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever. 5 And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.

1. God's love for his people is being set forth at the beginning, preparing them for the rebuke that was to come.

- *Revelation 3:19* As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

2. It is the fountain from which all other blessings flow.

- *Psalms 139:17-18* How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! 18 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand:

3. His love is what sustains us in every trial, calls us back to Him every time we wander. His love has been demonstrated in so many ways, the greatest of which is salvation.

- *Jeremiah 31:3* The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

4. It is a great insult to a Perfect, Almighty, Loving God to question His love for us. A Love that was proven by so great a Sacrifice.

- *Romans 5:8* But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

B. Where is my Honor?

Malachi 1:6 A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?

1. They had forgotten their place. The best way for us to know our place is to remember the space that he occupies in the universe and in our very existence.

- *Acts 17:24-25* God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

2. Reverence for God is a prerequisite to receiving His benefit

- *Ecclesiastes 12:13* Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.
- *Luke 6:46* And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?
- *Proverbs 9:10* The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

3. Our ability to serve others is dependent on following His lead

- *John 13:13-15* Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

C. The Polluted Sacrifices

Malachi 1:7-8 Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. 8 And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.

1. A great king demands obedience and adherence to his pattern

- *Malachi 1:14* But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.
- *Hebrews 8:1-5* Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. 3 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. 4 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: 5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

2. As the time approached for God to send his precious Son into the world, purity in the sacrifice was of the utmost importance

- *Hebrews 10:1* For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.
- *Hebrews 10:8-9* Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; 9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

3. Despite the inability of these sacrifices to take away sin, they were a foreshadowing of the one who could, He was sinless, and thus the sacrifices must be without blemish

- *John 1:29* The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

D. A Charge to the Priesthood

Malachi 2:1-4 And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. 2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. 3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it. 4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

1. Leaders must be held to a higher level of accountability.

- *1 Timothy 5:17* Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

2. When leaders fail the common man and woman is sure to suffer.

- *1 Timothy 4:16* Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

3. Positions of leadership are vulnerable to abuse and such was the case here.

- *1 Peter 5:2-3* Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

E. Divorce; Leaving the Wife of Their Youth for the Daughter of Strange gods

Malachi 2:10-11, 16 Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. 16 For the LORD, the God of Israel,

saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

1. They had exchanged God's purpose in marriage for their own interests

- *Genesis 2:18* And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.
- *Genesis 2:23-24* And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. **24** Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.
- *Matthew 19:8* He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

2. They were exchanging the true blessing of "the wife of their youth" for the temporal gain that it brought them, it was a losing proposition by any standard

- *Proverbs 5:18* Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.
- *Proverbs 31:10* Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.
- *Proverbs 31:28* Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

3. God considered it a treachery to break this sacred vow, he still does

- *Malachi 2:14* Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

F. Robbing God; The Tithes and Offerings

Malachi 3:8-12 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. **9** Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. **10** Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. **11** And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. **12** And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

1. When a man robs God he robs himself

- *Proverbs 3:9-10* Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: **10** So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

2. We have nothing on earth that was not supplied by Heaven

- *John 3:27* John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.
- *James 1:17* Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

3. We are stewards over God's gifts

- *1 Corinthians 6:19-20* What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? *20* For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

4. We will reap according to how we sow and according to the motivation behind our generosity

- *2 Corinthians 9:6-7* But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. *7* Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

G. Stout words spoken against God

- *Malachi 3:13-15* Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? *14* Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? *15* And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

It is a foolish thing to speak against the one who fashioned our tongues. Against the one who holds our very existence in the palm of His hand but that is precisely what the people were doing and that is what we too, at times, are guilty of when we question God and his plan in our lives. It is like when a child talks back to a parent, and then even worse, when corrected tries to defend what they have done.

III. Promises to Come

A. A Foreshadowing of the Gentiles

- *Malachi 1:10-11* Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. *11* For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

The Jewish people had suffered much at the hand of surrounding Gentile nations. They would suffer many more devastations in the centuries that would follow. This was a stern reminder to them that although they were God's chosen people, and the first to whom the law had been given, they were not

the only focus of God's love. The time of the gentiles would come and this along with other OT prophecies served as a foreshadowing of God's greater plan of salvation for the whole world.

B. Judgment is Coming

- *Malachi 4:1-4 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. 4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.*

Future judgment, and our interest in being on the right side of it, can be a great motivator to serve God in sincerity and truth. There was a bigger picture to be considered here, and the people needed to understand that they were placed here “for such a time as this”, that although they may be a small cog, they were placed within a great wheel and they needed to play their part well.

C. One More Prophet-John the Baptist

- *Malachi 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*

Although they were probably unaware at the time, this would be the last prophet that God would send to them for a long time. Many generations would follow that would never hear a prophet speak in their days. A time of prophetic darkness would follow, yet this prophecy would provide them with a light of hope that God would visit them again. The long silence that would separate Malachi with the fulfillment of this prophecy in John the Baptist would cause John to shine all the brighter when he did appear. He was zealous for the Lord, a voice crying in the wilderness, “prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”. Indeed John did turn many hearts to the Lord, and made ready a people who finally received their long awaited Messiah.

D. Messenger of the Covenant-Jesus Christ the Righteous

- *Malachi 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Sudden as the arrival of Jesus Christ may have seemed to the world, it was in no way sudden to God. He had waited for the fullness of time to come, the moment in human history in which He had long before planned for His dear Son to arrive. Jesus Christ took upon himself the likeness of our sinful flesh at the exact moment in time in which He would have the greatest impact on the world. At the time in which many would delight in Him.

- *Galatians 4:4-5* But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

IV. 400 years of Silence (sort of)- The Interbiblical Period

- A. The book of Malachi has an abrupt ending. Like a book that requires a sequel, incomplete. It would be a little over 400 years before the next chapter was to be released by inspiration and the prophesied events would come to pass. This period of time is sometimes referred to as the 400 years of silence. While that is an accurate description in terms of prophetic communication from God, it was a time beaming with activity and contains some of the most providential workings of God in the course of human history. Many of the events of this period were not done by God's people but for them and their preservation and to prepare the world for the fulfillment of prophecy. This period is proof of what Franklin said "God governs in the affairs of men. God was busy at work. Here are a small portion of things which God directed by His providential hand during the interbiblical period.
- *Daniel 2:21* And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:
 - *Daniel 2:31-35* Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. 32 This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, 33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. 34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. 35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.
 1. Babylon was the dominant world power at the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., this was the head of Gold in Daniel's interpretation of the dream. Many Jews would find wealth here and establish their lives, never returning to their homeland. This firmly established a dispersion of Jews throughout the world.
 2. Around 540 B.C. the Persians would overtake Babylon, they were the silver breast and arms. Cyrus (prophesied of in scripture even by name!) would not only allow, but aid the Jews in their return to their homeland and the repair of their temple and customs. Thus preserving the Jews religion, even if by a thread.
 3. On more than one occasion the Persians were unable to overtake the comparatively small nation of Greece, thus sparing the world from Persian customs. In 332 B.C., Alexander the Great, would overtake Persia and much of the world, advancing as far as India. He took control of Egypt where the city of Alexandria would be named after him. The Greeks were the belly and thighs of brass in Daniel's vision.

4. Alexander's reign would be short, lasting only 12 years, and his kingdom would be divided among four of his generals. The Ptolemies and the Seleucids would be the two that would most directly affect the life of the Jews.
5. Wherever they went they brought their Greek philosophy and way of life, known as Hellenism. Their language would be almost universally adopted and came the closest of any language to undoing the confusion of language at Babel, becoming almost universally spoken even by the Jews. This would become the language of the New Testament. After the death of Alexander, a library would be built in his honor, in Alexandria, and become the center of learning in the world.
6. It was here around 250 B.C. a most remarkable event occurred. The writing of the Septuagint, the translation of the Old Testament Scriptures into the Greek language. Now all the world could read the writings of the Hebrew people, preparing the Gentile nations for what was to come.
7. Around 165 B.C. the Maccabean revolt, led by Judas Maccabeus, prevented the utter destruction of Jewish life at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanes. Temporarily preserving the nation until a new, more tolerant Nation would arise.
8. Around 146 B.C. Rome would become the dominant world power, wresting it away from the Greeks. This nation is the legs and feet of iron mixed with clay. It was under this government that the New Testament would commence and our Savior would be born.
9. Each of these world powers is displayed in Daniel's interpretation in human form. They were made by man, and subject to his imperfection. Yet there was another kingdom mentioned in Daniel's prophecy, this kingdom was not formed by human hands but by the work of the Divine architect, God himself. This is the New Testament church kingdom.
 - a. *Daniel 2:44* And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.
10. It was upon this kingdom that the Sun of Righteousness would arise and welcome all people who would be obedient to His decrees. It would arise in the time of that fourth kingdom, Rome, and would be an everlasting Kingdom which would break in pieces and consume all the kingdoms of the earth. It has stood ever since, and will stand through the final age, of which we can be most confident.